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Story on Mexico wiretaps prompts denial by CIA

By Michael Hedges
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A report in a San Diego newspaper that the CIA tapped the phones of Mexican police and government officials to gain information in the slaying of a U.S. drug enforcement agent has provoked an unusual official denial from the CIA.

"The CIA doesn't normally comment on stories alleging CIA activities. We are making an exception because the San Diego Union story is untrue, and misleads the American people," the CIA said in a statement late yesterday.

The story published yesterday quoted unidentified "intelligence

sources" as saying taps were placed on the phones of high-ranking Mexican officials and that the information gained confirmed charges of corruption among Mexican officials.

The newspaper said the operation was conducted without the knowledge of the Mexican government because of fears that would endanger the probe into the kidnapping and torture-murder of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena Salazar, whose body was found in March 1985 outside Guadalajara, Mexico.

"The suggestion that the CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotic trafficking is false," the CIA statement said.

State Department officials also denied the report, saying, "Any suggestion that we are targeting Mexican officials is untrue."

The Mexican Embassy in Washington said it was considering a response, but had not released a statement at press time yesterday.

The office of Karin Winner, managing editor of The San Diego Union, was contacted yesterday, but she did not return calls by early evening.

President Reagan signed an executive order five years ago authorizing the CIA to "collect, produce and disseminate intelligence on foreign aspects of narcotics production and trafficking."

It requires the CIA to use "the least intrusive collection techniques feasible" and prohibits the use of "electronic surveillance, unconsented physical search or monitoring devices unless they are . . . approved by the attorney general."